On Saturday, October 17, Cathedral Academy alumni are invited back to their alma mater to celebrate the Centennial Reunion. The cornerstone for the building that became Cathedral Academy was laid in 1915 at the corner of Madison and Montgomery Streets in downtown Syracuse. Erected for $60,000, the building was first known as St. Mary’s Academy – the site was once home to the original St. Mary’s Church, a precursor to the Cathedral of Immaculate Conception.

When the school opened, 183 students – grades one through six – attended. One class was added each year, until the high school officially opened in 1919. The first graduating class – featuring one girl and 16 boys – turned their tassels in June, 1923. Cathedral Academy remained a high school until 1972, when it went back to its elementary school roots. Students came not only from surrounding neighborhoods, but from the suburbs as well. Many took a bus to the downtown location.

“My sister and I rode a bus for 5.12 a day from Fayetteville to the Downtown Cathedral in 1952,” says Patti Hicks Nardella, who graduated in 1956. She remembers there were students who picked up the route from Manlius and Dewitt. “It was a wonderful school. The nuns taught us great discipline. I wouldn’t have changed it for anything,” she says.

Enrollment at Cathedral Academy averaged about 500 students each year, but never more than 200 students were enrolled in the high school at one time. As a result, the classes were especially close-knit.

“We had a very small class, there were only 26 students,” said Gerry Hoffman, President of the Class of 1953. After Cathedral Academy, he graduated from Syracuse University’s Newhouse School. He went on to serve as Director of Public Relations at the University. Hoffman speaks excitedly about his time at Cathedral Academy, especially about his interactions with his classmates and his teachers, the nuns of the Daughters of Charity – memories echoed by fellow Academy alumni.

“My best memory was the camaraderie we had,” says John Bandoblu, a retired banker and Cathedral Academy’s Class of 1953 President. “Everybody stuck together and watched out for each other,” says Judy MacDonald Miller, Class of 1946, who often meets her girlfriends from the class for dinner. “It was a wonderful school. The nuns taught us great discipline. I wouldn’t have changed it for anything,” she says.

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He lights up as he tells a story about how a smart-aleck response on his part (to a request from the Student Council president, no less!) landed him in detention after school with Sister Agnes:

“I delivered textbooks from the convent [next door] to the school for at least an hour. Then, we went talking. If she liked you, she called you ‘Boy.’ But, when she was annoyed at me, she called me Arthur – and the way she said Arthur, he paused to put extra emphasis on the “Ar” sound. ‘She said ‘Boy, what are you thinking of doing? Are you thinking about the priesthood?’ I said ‘Not really.’ But, I was lying, and she knew it. She said, ‘You remind me of so many boys I had who went in the Seminary.’ I delivered textbooks from the convent [next door] to the school for at least an hour. Then, we went talking. If she liked you, she called you ‘Boy.’ But, when she was annoyed at me, she called me Arthur – and the way she said Arthur, he paused to put extra emphasis on the “Ar” sound. ‘She said ‘Boy, what are you thinking of doing? Are you thinking about the priesthood?’ I said ‘Not really.’ But, I was lying, and she knew it. She said, ‘You remind me of so many boys I had who went in the Seminary.’

And so to the Seminary, Arthur did. He went on to lead the parish of St. James Church in Syracuse as a priest.

“I can say this honestly, the happiest time of my life was at Cathedral Academy,” he says. “I loved it here.”

Vinette, Bandoblu, Hoffman, Hicks Nardella and MacDonald Miller are just five of a group of about 125 people-organizers expect to attend the Centennial Reunion.

“We Figured out the youngest person who comes will be 61 years old, said Kathy Fedrizzi, Executive Director of the Guardian Angel Society, and organizer of the Centennial Reunion.

The oldest people in attendance might be 90-years-young, or older. Many of the alumni are local, but some are traveling into town from out of state.

The special evening will begin with a special Mass at the Cathedral at 5:10 pm. Bishop Cunningham will preside. A reception will follow in the school’s recently renovated auditorium, the site of many school dances from yesteryear. Alumni will also be able to tour the school, and ride in a brand new elevator just installed this year! They may peruse a museum in the basement and view memorabilia from their schooldays. Yearbooks and pictures will also be displayed at the reception.

“It’s really about a celebration to bring the alumni who graduated from that school back together,” Fedrizzi said. “This is about a building in the City of Syracuse that’s being used, not sitting or falling apart. So many good memories have come out of that school. What a time to bring those all to light again, and bring the people.”

*For more information, please contact the Guardian Angel Society at (315) 422-7218.*

By Alice Maggiore, Downtown Committee

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Cathedral Academy's Centennial Celebration: 100 Years Old & Younger Than Ever

A sampling of the memorabilia alumni will be able to view of the Centennial Reunion. This is located in the museum in the basement of the building that once housed Cathedral Academy.

Sister Agnes was a favorite; her name came up in several conversations.

“She was a great lady,” recalls Art Vinette, Class of 1960. “You did not screw around in her classroom, trust me. I was known for doing that, but not with Aggie, baby!”

And so to the Seminary, Arthur did. He went on to lead the parish of St. James Church in Syracuse as a priest.

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Cathedral Academy's 2007 graduating class consisted of 54 students, including twelve women and ten men. To the right, the graduates are pictured with Mage McPeak.

The Cathedral Academy yearbook, Class of 1955.

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